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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [MARR](#) [ODIP](#) [OPDC](#) [KDEM](#) [IAEA](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: DEMARCHE DEAD LETTER OFFICE

REF: A. LA PAZ 1023
[1](#)B. 07 LA PAZ 2974
[1](#)C. 07 LA PAZ 2587

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Responding to a negative shift in the Foreign Ministry's working-level relationship with the Embassy, we are reevaluating how to deal with the MFA. Well before the expulsion of Ambassador Goldberg and expulsions of USAID and DEA from the Chapare, the MFA had been increasingly unresponsive and dismissive of Embassy requests and USG positions. One MFA contact told us delivering demarches ipso facto ensures that they will be referred to hard-line Presidential Palace advisors. He said we would be better served to leave some contentious issues, for example Iran's nuclear program, with careerists in the field. Another MFA contact conceded most USG demarches are ignored or rejected in knee-jerk fashion and suggested raising shared international concerns through other missions. MFA careerist contacts lament the Spring replacement of Ministry careerists with political appointees in key positions. During recent negotiating experiences, MFA contacts have urged us to make minor changes to existing proposals so the MFA can claim it is not just rubber-stamping agreements with prior governments. We are inclined to accept recent MFA demands that the Embassy provide diplomatic notes for even routine demarches, not to appease Bolivian notions that we do not show them appropriate respect, but rather because we do not trust MFA officials to provide an accurate account of our meetings. End Summary.

Exhibit A: UNGA and General Unresponsiveness

[1](#)2. (C) When PolOff asked about the composition of the Bolivian delegation to UNGA August 25, the MFA's Director of Bilateral Relations Jean Paul Guevara, Chief of the Americas Section Maria Estella Mendoza, and U.S. Desk Officer Arce collectively shrugged their shoulders. Arce had given PolOff a broad idea of the composition about a month earlier and PolOff had obtained a more refined list from another MFA contact prior to the meeting, but Post wanted to get an official listing of the delegation, their agenda, and determine their interest in meeting USG officials on the

margins. "We do not know," said Guevara. However, later the same day Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca publicly announced the delegation's composition and travel schedule. Through other MFA contacts, PolOff learned Guevara was intimately involved in the planning and attended part of the UNGA.

13. (C) Later, when PolOff was attempting to deliver a demarche requesting Bolivian positions on UNGA human rights votes, the MFA's Director of International Organizations (Office of Multilateral Affairs) directed PolOff to send the demarche to his e-mail account because "this is easier than meeting. If we need a meeting, I'll let you know." PolOff is still waiting for a response to the September 26 e-mail. Last year, then Director of IOs Ruben Vidaurre (strictly protect) met with PolOff multiple times on UNGA-related issues and was diligent about getting back to us with information on Bolivian views/votes. Similarly, PolOff was directed to write a letter to Director of Multilateral Affairs Edgar Pinto Tapia on a number of demarche issues. PolOff addressed the concerns in a May 27 letter, but also requested a follow up meeting to discuss them. Eventually a June 10 meeting was arranged with subordinates, which, although very cordial, did not result in any follow-up action, as promised, on the part of the MFA.

Exhibit B: Shooting Ourselves in Iranian Foot

14. (C) Post has been selective about delivering demarches on Iran, not so much because of the government's inherent sensitivity to criticism of its new ally and the increasingly diminishing likelihood of Bolivian action against Iran, but rather because of the probability we would get a better result by not delivering certain demarches. Ex-Director Vidaurre told us a demarche we delivered in September 2007 (reftel c) concerning an IAEA vote on Iran worked to undermine careerists in Vienna pursuing goals consistent with the USG position. He explained that starting sometime in 2007 our demarches were being routinely sent to the Presidential Palace, where hard-liners were inclined to oppose whatever position we advocated regardless of the merits. Vidaurre said by red-flagging the issue with the palace we had inadvertently prompted a "gag order" from the Palace for Bolivia's IAEA delegation to abstain on all Iranian-related votes.

Careerist Appointees: Let Sleeping Dogs Lie

15. (C) Left to their own devices, Vidaurre said the IAEA delegation would have better chances to convince La Paz counterparts to endorse a policy more in line with the U.S. position. He explained that in the "new" MFA, political appointees, often with little or no background in international affairs or subject matter expertise, are disposed to leave complicated issues or technical decisions to careerists, who are more inclined to support U.S.-friendly policies.

Exhibit C: 505 Agreement and "Dignity Changes"

16. (C) The long, strange trip Post had to take to reach a 505/end-use agreement for military equipment with the Bolivian government speaks volumes about the MFA's new approach to dealing with the United States. PolOff delivered a diplomatic note offering our proposed text for the agreement in March, explaining the reasons for the new agreement and that it was needed to obtain GPOI (Global Peace Operations Initiative) and other new program funds. In at least four follow-on meetings each with the MFA and Ministry of Defense, EmbOffs asked for a status of a government reply, offered our help with any questions about the proposed text, and reiterated that the agreement was needed for GPOI funds before the end of the fiscal year. Expect for a request to provide all referenced agreements, which we complied with May 16, EmbOffs received no questions on text and assurances that

it "looks fine" and "we will rely heavily on the Defense Ministry for this." The issue was also brought up at several higher-level meetings between Ambassador and/or DCM and both Minister of Defense Walker San Miguel and Vice Minister of Foreign Relations Hugo Fernandez.

17. (C) By June 4, we were sufficiently concerned by lack of a formal reply that EmbOffs visited Vice Minister of Defense Wilfredo Vargas as a courtesy to remind him about the August 15 agreement deadline. We provided the same reminder to the MFA August 19, when PolOff told Director Guevara it was probably already too late for FY 08 funds and that failure to show progress on an agreement put future funds at risk as well. Given the choice of accepting the proposed language or putting funds in jeopardy, Guevara replied that "if we miss the deadline, this is fine, then we will work for 2009." On August 25, Guevara, Mendoza, and Arce questioned the need for the agreement, although they did not bring forth any specific questions on the proposed text. Guevara's secretary told PolOff after the meeting that the MFA group looked over the text for the first time that morning. In an August 27 joint MFA-MOD meeting with EmbOffs, Guevara stated he would not accept the text and, although he had no specific changes in mind at the time, Arce would provide them later. Guevara also maintains that the agreement was never explained to him, which is false, as PolOff explained it in detail to Guevara personally March 28. On September 12, the Embassy delivered dipnote 350/08 with new agreement text incorporating MFA concerns and dipnote 351/08 formally explaining the need for the agreement and answering questions brought up during the August 25 meeting. The MFA responded affirmatively September 17 via reply dipnote.

18. (C) By contrast, the Canadians tell us they concluded a similar agreement via MOU in three days in August. Although the Canadian version did not require an exchange of diplomatic notes, the same players in the MFA were looped into the process. Canadian Consul David Smart told us not to take it "personally," since "we do not have the same problems you have."

Demanding R-E-S-P-E-C-T, but Short on S-P-E-C-I-F-I-C-S

19. (C) During a September 23 meeting, Mendoza objected generally to the "lack of respect" for Bolivian concerns during USG bilateral negotiations. "You do not negotiate with us, you just hand us a proposal and we are imposed upon to accept it. That's not how countries operate; there has to be a give a take." PolOff replied that in any international negotiation some side has to make the initial proposal and that we have always been forthcoming about answering questions or entertaining Bolivian suggestions. Although Mendoza conceded the MFA objections came "very late" during the 505 negotiation, she maintained that the Bolivians should have been consulted before we proposed the agreement text. PolOff told Mendoza we respected the sovereign right of Bolivia to accept the proposal, propose changes, or reject it, but that we cannot start a process until a text is proposed. PolOff further explained that in order for the Embassy to "respect" Bolivian concerns, a Bolivian has to let us know what those concerns are. Flustered, Mendoza insisted she did not mean to imply Bolivia intended to reject any proposal and did not further explain her complaints beyond "that we work together in mutual respect."

"Improved" Agreements to Make Bolivia Feel Brand New

110. (C) Escorting PolOff from the September 23 meeting, Arce added that "I am willing to work (with USG), but we have to have something to show for it. We cannot continue as things were with prior governments." PolOff understood this vague statement (and others like it from Guevara, Mendoza, and Vice Minister Hugo Fernandez) to mean in the case of the 505 they insisted on some insignificant changes in order sell it to advisors in the Presidential Palace as a victory against the empire, which capitulated to Bolivian dignity changes. After

the government froze negotiation on a 2008 renewal of a interim Status of Forces Agreement, VM Fernandez advised us to similarly make minor changes and move the text around for a "new and improved" 2009 revision, allowing the government to claim it "was not just rubber stamping agreements with prior governments."

Stop Talking and Give Us Our Dipnote Dignity

¶11. (C) During an August 25 meeting with Guevara, Mendoza, and Arce, PolOff began the conversation with a softball offer to nominate an instructor in the MFA's diplomatic school for a USG-funded 2009 postgraduate course on U.S. security policy. This icebreaker was met with crossed arms and a rejection of some background information on the course. "We should have the proposal for this course in a diplomatic note," said Guevara, adding there should be a Spanish version attached to all dipnotes because "this is our mother tongue and we require respect for this." When asked if they were interested in the course, Guevara replied in the affirmative, but added "we must have this in an official proposal, we cannot just discuss it. It is a matter of our national dignity." Guevara similarly concluded that Post's demarche on treasury designations on Iranian citizens and firms would have to be in a dipnote and that our request for information concerning Bolivian views on the 5th Summit of the Americas in 2009 would also require a dipnote.

Careerist Advice and "Trojan Horse" Demarches

¶12. (C) Trusted MFA contact and Director of Policy Planning Jorge Caballero (strictly protect) acknowledged demarching the MFA is "often going to be a waste of time" and advised against any high-level demarching "until relations stabilize." Caballero told PolOff a more productive approach would be to share demarche concerns with other missions, particularly on common interests like counter-terrorism and relations with rogue regimes, and encourage them to engage the Bolivian government. Such a Trojan horse demarche, he claimed, would have more resonance from a friendly neighboring or European country than the knee-jerk negative reaction U.S. diplomats are likely to receive. He said the United States is not alone in frustration with the MFA, and cited a shouting match between Guevara and Brazilian diplomats. "Other missions are complaining about the same things," he explained, noting slights caused by lack of understanding of diplomatic norms by new political appointees are often misunderstood as deliberate offenses.

¶13. (C) EU Desk Officer Claudia Betancourt (strictly protect) told PolOff not to take offense to the "revolutionary discourse and Yankee bashing. ... This is all part of their show, they have to say these things." Betancourt added that "no matter what you say or how you say it, they will only hear the empire talking." Betancourt provided the example of a recent trip to European capitals, when Guevara told a group of Dutch parliamentarians he appreciated the European approach dealing with Bolivian on Iranian issues, which he described as "treating Bolivians as sovereign equals," explaining differences of opinion, and providing information to justify a harder line on Iran's nuclear weapons programs. Guevara allegedly contrasted this with the U.S. approach to "tell us what to do."

Spring Cleaning of MFA Careerists

¶14. (C) Caballero and Betancourt explained that a general downturn in working-level diplomatic emphasis was hastened by a Spring MFA reorganization that brought many political appointees to prominent Ministry positions, pushing careerists, like Vidaurre, to foreign postings. Ostensibly the government acknowledged the need for careerists in the field after a failed policy of pushing political appointees abroad early in the Morales Administration. Sending careerists abroad also serves the purpose of allowing the

government to cull less enthusiastic Morales supporters after returning by failing to provide an oncoming assignment, a legal method of replacing careerists with political appointees already well underway (reftel b). Many careerists, such as Julio Salas (strictly protect), former America Section Deputy, started looking for the exits after "seeing where this is going." Salas told PolOff he resigned in May largely because of Guevara's increasing marginalization of careerists and reliance on ideological instruction from the palace.

Comment:

¶15. (C) Post continues to conduct regular diplomatic business through diplomatic channels (i.e. demarches and meetings), but realizes the reality that respecting such norms has put us at a continual disadvantage with a country that does not respond in kind and prefers to conduct bilateral affairs via press conference. We are inclined to respect the MFA's new preference for dipnotes in lieu of demarches, but more because we do not trust the memories or intentions of MFA officials than out of any bizarre notion that we owe them dipnotes out of respect for Bolivian "dignity." The MFA's insistence on dipnotes with unofficial translations is already requiring a significant increase in the workload of our PAS translator, but we believe the extra effort to document each MFA encounter is necessary given the current political environment. Post is, however, approaching the MFA sparingly on a case-by-case basis with demarche requests. As Vidaurre alluded, we would be wise to apply demarches to the "first do no harm" threshold. End Comment.

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